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ABSTRACT

The simultaneous restructuring of K-12 schools and teacher education programs located in rural regions is of primary importance. This paper explores the philosophical and theoretical rationales for the establishment of partnerships between a regional institution of higher education (IHE) and the local schools in the rural region served by the IHE. The rationales for the development of partnerships are centered on the need for changing school practices based on the needs of society for the future and on several of John Goodlad's Postulates for teacher preparation. In addition to reviewing eight of Goodlad's postulates, the paper reviews U.S. government publications and Business Roundtable on the skills and attitudes required because of societal change. The paper also describes a partnership between Wayne State College (Nebraska), two educational service units, and 37 public school districts. (Author/IAH)

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Developing School/College Partnerships in Rural Regions

A Philosophical Rationale

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ABSTRACT

Developing School/College Partnerships in Rural Regions

The simultaneous restructuring of K-12 schools and teacher education programs located in rural regions is of primary importance. This paper explores the philosophical and theoretical rationales for the establishment of partnerships between a regional IHE and the local schools in the rural region served by the IHE. The rationales for the development of partnerships are centered on the need for changing school practices based on the needs of society for the future and on several of John Goodlad's Postulates for teacher preparation. In addition, examples in current and future partnership arrangements are provided.

Developing School/College Partnerships in Rural Regions

The restructuring of K-12 school systems has become a reality in many areas. At the same time, the restructuring of teacher preparation programs has also taken on a new significance. As the public schools experiment with new methods of delivery, extended school days and years, site based management, teacher empowerment, and other aspects of restructuring, it becomes necessary that teacher education institutions develop professionals who are capable and willing to participate in the renewal efforts currently underway. One effective way for this to happen is to develop viable and meaningful partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHE) and local school districts. The American Association for Higher Education (Wilbur & Lambert, 1991) has compiled an extensive list of partnerships between local school districts and IHEs. According to Wilbur and Lambert, partnerships have been developed to provide direct services to students; to provide services for educators; to coordinate, develop, and assess curriculum and instruction; and to mobilize, direct, and promote sharing of educational resources.

While Wilbur and Lambert have presented many excellent partnership models, there are very few partnerships described which relate to regional IHEs located in rural regions. Local school districts in rural regions differ significantly from their urban counterparts. They also exhibit a great deal of diversity when compared to other rural schools. A public school district in a rural region may have a K-12 enrollment of 200 students or less. Other school districts in the same region may report enrollments significantly higher. In many rural schools there may be

only one teacher per grade level or subject area. Rural schools are located in very small communities relatively isolated from urban centers. Adequate funding for educational enhancement opportunities is often lacking. Isolation, lack of financial support, lack of professional development opportunities, and other problems tend to mark the lives of professionals in these rural regions.

For restructuring to take place in these schools, a major effort must be undertaken to assist the professionals in developing plans and implementing ideas. A regional IHE can provide the impetus and the expertise to assist school districts in these efforts. At the same time the IHE is assisting the local schools in restructuring efforts, the restructuring of the teacher preparation program can take place. One of the goals of developing partnerships should be the strengthening of public schools and simultaneously strengthening teacher preparation.

The regional IHE has a strong investment in assisting in the restructuring of K-12 education in the region. Students from the local school districts provide the population base for the IHE. Teachers and administrators in the local school districts are very often graduates of the professional preparation programs at the IHE. One important aspect of school improvement involves increasing the quality of instruction in the schools. For this to occur, better teachers must be available. In order for better teachers to be available, the quality of incoming students must be better.

In addition, IHEs require that access be provided to the best practice models which currently exist in many schools. To develop best practice models, innovative

ideas, and effective methods must be presented to currently practicing teachers. For this to happen, colleges and universities must develop effective, working partnerships with the local schools which will assist in the preparation of new professionals as well as providing a path for the renewal of the K-12 systems. The problems inherent with this in rural regions are directly related to numbers of school districts, the enormity of the geography, the diversity of the schools, and the divergent needs of these districts. IHEs in rural regions do not have the luxury of being able to select and develop one or two school districts as partners. Instead, the IHE must develop partnership arrangements with many different districts.

A Basis for Partnership Development

Two differing, but related, elements provide the basis for the development of viable partnerships: First, the skills necessary for children to possess for the future have changed dramatically. Business and industry are requiring differing abilities and attitudes than in the past. Second, teacher education is coming under increased attack from many quarters. While there are negative connotations inherent in this, it is better to assume a positive response to what needs to happen to better prepare educators for our schools. Each of these two areas will be dealt with separately.

Many different individuals and groups have reported on changes in the workplace and in society in general to which schools have not responded. The governors and the president have presented K-12 schools with six national goals for the year 2000. While these goals are lofty and may, in reality, be unreachable by that year, they do provide a beginning place for re-examining our nation's schools.

In rural regions many of these goals may already have been reached. For example, goal 2 states that the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent. In many rural regions high school dropouts are not recognized as a problem. Almost all students who begin school in these regions also graduate. Most rural schools are free of drugs and violence such as we see from media reports of urban settings. One exception to this is the ever-present concern over alcohol abuse by students. The other four goals provide a vehicle for the examination of educational programs. Few of the rural schools can honestly say that they have reached these.

In addition to the national goals, the United States Department of Education has published America 2000 (USDE, 1991). This educational strategy has been designed to assist in the achievement of the national goals. A four part strategy has been presented which if implemented will enable every school to improve. Many rural schools do not have the physical and fiscal resources to adequately meet the challenges of this endeavor independently. In many instances the physical plants are old but adequately maintained. However, the physical plant does not lend itself to innovative teaching techniques. The fiscal resources of the rural schools are often less than adequate because of limited tax bases.

Futurist writers such as Toffler, Naisbitt and others have written about changes as we move from a society centered on industry to a society centered on service and information and beyond. While these changes may not be readily apparent in rural regions, they will ultimately affect the graduates of schools from these regions. One of the major problems facing rural regions is the lack of

employment opportunities in the region. Those connected with rural regions recognize the adverse effects of the "brain drain" from the region. On a more positive note, Naisbitt has also reported on the resurgence of rural regions. For the first time in our nation's history we are seeing more people move from urban to rural than vice versa. This has the potential to have a negative effect on the schools in rural regions.

The United States Department of Labor (1991) published the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report, What Work Requires of Schools. This report identified the competencies and skills that today's high performance employer seeks in tomorrow's employee. This report articulated a three part foundation of basic skills (including reading, writing, arithmetic, listening, and speaking), thinking skills (including creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning), and personal qualities (including responsibility, self esteem, sociability, self management, and integrity). In addition to the foundation, five competencies for the future were identified. These included (1) the ability to identify, organize, plan, and allocate resources; (2) work with others; (3) acquire and use information; (4) understand complex inter-relationships; and (5) work with a variety of technologies. All of these require that rural as well as urban schools and teachers assume new roles in the preparation of students.

The Business Roundtable (1991) further expanded on the ideas of the SCANS report by discussing the essential components of a successful education system.

These include:

1. The new system is committed to four operating assumptions:
   A. All students can learn at significantly higher levels
   B. We know how to teach all students successfully
   C. Curriculum content must reflect high expectations for all students, but instructional time and strategies may vary to assure success
   D. Every child must have an advocate
2. The new system is performance or outcome based
3. Assessment strategies must be as strong and rich as the outcomes
4. Schools should receive rewards for success, assistance to improve, and penalties for failure
5. School based staff have a major role in making instructional decisions
6. Major emphasis is placed on staff development
7. A high quality pre-kindergarten program is established, at least for all disadvantaged students
8. Health and other social services are sufficient to reduce significant barriers to learning
9. Technology is used to raise student and teacher productivity and to expand access to learning.

While these changes can be accomplished within school districts in urban settings, it is difficult for small, rural districts to implement many of these. It is difficult to

achieve meaningful staff development activities for schools having limited staff. The lack of technology opportunities presents a major obstacle to many districts. However, if schools are to serve all of their students well, it is important that efforts be made in regard to restructuring along these lines.

In addition to the new skills and attitudes required because of the societal changes it is imperative that colleges and universities located in rural regions develop partnerships which will enhance teacher education with local school districts. Goodlad (1990) provided nineteen postulates some of which have a direct relationship to this.

Postulate five states: "*The responsible group of academic and clinical faculty members . . . must have a comprehensive understanding of the aims of education and the role of schools in our society and be fully committed to selecting and preparing teachers to assume the full range of educational responsibilities required*" (p. 56). As college and university faculty work with public school personnel in restructuring efforts, they should develop a renewed sense of the purpose of schooling. Developing new roles for college and university faculty becomes an important aspect of the development of partnerships. College and university faculty must assume roles which create opportunities to directly interact with public school professionals in ways apart from the traditional college classroom. These may include working directly with a group of teachers or an individual teacher, teaching classrooms of children, modeling effective methods in classrooms, etc.

Postulate eight states: "*Programs for the education of educators must*

provide extensive opportunities for future teachers to move beyond being students of organized knowledge to become teachers who inquire into both knowledge and its teaching" (p. 58). As attempts are made to assist preservice teachers in developing attitudes which allow for inquiry into the nature of teaching and knowledge of subject matter, they must be allowed to conduct applied research studies in conjunction with cooperating schools and teachers. Partnership sites which allow for opportunities to conduct this type of research must be developed.

Postulate nine states: "*Programs for the education of educators must be characterized by a socialization process through which candidates transcend their self-oriented student preoccupations to become more other-oriented in identifying with a culture of teaching*" (p. 59). Students will not become socialized into the profession through sitting in the college or university classroom. Effective socialization into the profession requires that these young people must have opportunities to work closely with exemplary models of education professionals. The mentor/novice approach can lead these fledgling teachers into a better understanding of the system. Providing early and continued exposure to models of best practice provides preservice educators with opportunities to more easily relate theory to practice.

Postulate ten states: "*Programs for the education of educators must be characterized in all respects by the conditions for learning that future teachers are to establish in their own schools and classrooms*" (p. 59). Colleges and universities must develop the methods for allowing prospective teachers the opportunities to

observe and emulate effective classroom models. In addition, students must be able to witness college and university faculty demonstrating various aspects of practice in settings with authentic learners. Merely theorizing about an area will not be very convincing to the novice. In addition, practicing teachers must be incorporated into the preparation program as instructors of various skills and behaviors.

Postulate twelve states: "*Programs for the education of educators must involve future teachers in the issues and dilemmas that emerge out of the never-ending tension between the rights and interests of individual parents and special interest groups, on one hand, and the role of schools in transcending parochialism, on the other*" (p. 60). In conjunction with on campus professional coursework, clinical and field based experiences can lead future educators to an understanding of this tension. Again, merely discussing this does not lend itself to effective understandings. Prospective educators must witness this tension as it operates in the schools on an almost daily basis. Meeting with professionals and parents can open the opportunities for preservice teachers to develop an understanding of these issues.

Postulate fourteen states: "*Programs for the education of educators must involve future teachers not only in understanding schools as they are but in alternatives, the assumptions underlying alternatives, and how to effect needed changes in school organization, pupil grouping, curriculum, and more*" (p.61). Schools in rural areas are fortunate in that they have the ability to change and adapt more easily than their urban counterparts. Of course, this is only possible if they choose to do so. Individual teachers and schools have incorporated current and best

practice in many instances. Prospective educators must have the opportunities to observe these practices. In addition, schools and teachers working in conjunction with teacher education faculty can be encouraged to adopt current and best practices.

Postulate fifteen states: "*Programs for the education of educators must assure for each candidate the availability of a wide array of laboratory settings for observation, hands-on experiences, and exemplary schools for internships and residencies; they must admit no more students to their programs than can be assured these quality experiences*" (p. 61). This postulate is at the heart of developing partnerships in rural regions. In the past it has often been the practice to place students in settings merely for the sake of placement. Quality control measures were frequently ignored. Expediency was the guiding principle. Teacher education faculty have a moral obligation to the prospective educators to assist schools in becoming effective models of the practices being taught. Those in the business of preparing the educators of the future must also be involved in assisting the laboratories of the present in restructuring along the lines of current and best practice.

Postulate sixteen states: "*Programs for the education of educators must engage future teachers in the problems and dilemmas arising out of the inevitable conflicts and incongruencies between what works or is accepted in practice and the research and theory supporting other options*" (p. 62). As with the previous postulate, it is imperative that new and more effective methods be presented to the future teachers, but they must also be incorporated into the daily practice of the

schools in the region. Both beginning teachers and experienced veterans must be exposed to the current best practices for schooling. As preservice teachers develop skills and attitudes they must continually see these practiced by professionals. Partnership arrangements allow for this.

Goodlad has supplied a strong basis for developing partnerships between IHEs and local school districts in rural regions. In addition to his recommendations, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU, 1991) has also incorporated this notion into the President's Agenda for Improving Teacher Education. The third point of the five point agenda entitled Teach America states that "Presidents must connect teacher education to the K-12 schools and their communities." This document calls for action on the parts of Presidents of the AASCU institutions to assist in the restructuring of teacher education.

Barriers to Partnerships in Rural Regions

While there are many barriers to partnership development in rural regions, a few stand out as being most significant. First, the enormity of the geographic region served by a regional IHE can make partnership development difficult. The public schools of the region are spread over a considerable distance throughout the region. It is difficult for faculty to find the time and the means for extensive travel to develop meaningful partnerships and still meet the other requirements of their positions.

Second, developing a partnership with a single school district will not provide enough spaces to meet the needs of the prospective teachers. In rural

regions the schools are small and very often isolated. For example, in northeast Nebraska there are 37 separate and autonomous school districts spread over an area of approximately 15,000 square miles. Identifying and developing partnerships with individual schools in this area can be difficult at best.

Third, teacher preparation in rural regions is often looked at by the K-12 schools as being those people in the ivory towers. The attitude which is often portrayed by cooperating teachers and principals is that they will give the prospective teacher the real facts about teaching. Even though the teachers and administrators are largely graduates of the IHE's preparation program, they do not see the relevancy in the program.

Fourth, faculty who teach in teacher preparation programs have developed a strong sense of appropriate practice for preparing future educators. While these practices have worked quite well in the past, they may no longer be effective for preparing educators for the future. As an example, new accreditation standards have created a great deal of discomfort in many faculty.

The Current State at one IHE in a Rural Region

Wayne State College is a small, comprehensive institution located in the Northeast corner of Nebraska. For one hundred years Wayne State College has been preparing teachers and administrators for the schools in the region. Wayne State College was originally founded as a normal school. In recent years it has undergone a transformation from solely teacher preparation to a much more comprehensive mission. Twenty years ago 90% of the graduates were from teacher

education. Now, approximately 35% of the graduates are educators. Wayne State College is typical of many other institutions located in similar settings.

Two years ago, Wayne State College, two Educational Service Units, and 37 public school districts made a commitment to work more cooperatively and in a partnership for assisting first year teachers. From this partnership grew the Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership (Harris, 1991). In its first two years of operation the Partnership has assisted over two hundred beginning teachers.

During the fall semester of 1991, Wayne State College and the two service units agreed to expand their efforts in partnership development. Two other educational service units and the schools served by them were invited to join in a partnership which would respond to the America 2000 efforts. As a result of an initial meeting with selected superintendents, principals, directors of service units, and staff development personnel, the idea for an academy for educational leadership emerged. This academy has been envisioned as serving the needs of administrators, teachers, and school board members. The primary function of the academy is to assist schools and teachers in developing methods for achieving school restructuring initiatives. While the academy concept is fledgling at the present time, all who have been involved in its development have been highly supportive. The academy intends to conduct its first business during the summer session of 1992 with a workshop for administrators and school board members regarding defining the six national goals and their relationship to the region.

As the academy continues to grow and develop more information and data

needs to be gathered concerning the needs and attitudes of those involved in education in the region. A survey (Harris and Manges, 1991) has been developed which is being mailed to school board members, administrators, and teachers concerning 11 aspects related to restructuring. The data gathered from this survey will be analyzed and used in making decisions regarding future activities of the academy. It should be pointed out that the academy will not be Wayne State College's academy. Rather, it will be driven by the college, the educational service units, and the local school districts. For an endeavor of this type to be viable, it must include all constituents.

Future Plans and Directions

Building on the current state of affairs regarding partnership development, there are many plans currently being developed. Among these plans are changes in laboratory experiences for prospective educators. No longer will student teaching and other field based experiences be completed in the most expedient manner. Rather, the best teachers will be sought to provide effective models for the novice teacher.

The elementary education program is developing plans for joining with an area community college in developing a 2 + 1 + 1 program. Students in this program will complete three years of their program on the campus of the community college. The faculty from the elementary education program will provide instruction for required courses on the community college campus. The fourth year of the program will include the final methods courses and the student teaching experience.

Regional community colleges must be a part of the partnership movement as well as the local schools.

Plans are currently underway to incorporate much more input from exemplary teachers in the region into the preparation of the preservice teachers. These teachers will be called upon to provide classroom presentations and demonstration lessons regarding particular concepts being presented. In addition to this, plans are being developed for college faculty to engage in activities in the local schools. These activities will range from teaching lessons to children, to developing effective staff development opportunities, to working with individual teachers in planning and implementing new methods for instruction.

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